

Washington's Dispatch

How It Was Delivered and the Reply That Was Brought Back

By ETHAN TOMLINSON

It was the winter that the American patriots were dying like sheep at Valley Forge. Washington's headquarters were at Morristown, N. J.

One day Captain Alexander Hamilton went hurriedly into his office without stopping to knock. Washington looked up at him, surprised at his want of military deference. But he soon changed his expression.

"The French are coming to help us, general!" said Hamilton.

The general sat thinking. A great many matters hinged on this information.

"Captain," he said at last, "our enemies will strain every nerve to win their cause before our allies can reach us. Of the different moves they will make the one I fear most is attempts to seduce our people by offering liberal terms for a surrender of our independence. They will try to win over some of our most prominent patriots not only by such promises, but by offers of money and position if they will use their influence to induce our people to submit to the king. The place from which these offers will emanate is Philadelphia, now occupied by General Howe, surrounded by many sympathetic Tories. I shall send a message to those of our prominent men there urging them to stand steadfast, and with this help of the French our independence will be achieved."

When toward evening the message was ready, Washington handed it to his aid, saying:

"It is too important to trust to an ordinary post rider. It must be carried through the British lines into Philadelphia."

"Yes, general, and, coming from you, it will doubtless have a great effect. General Howe would give half his army to intercept or delay its reaching those for whom it is intended before he has a chance to corrupt them." As to the messenger, young Janeway is your man by all means—he who carried the message through to our friends in New York when we were on Long Island."

That night Walter Janeway, a young officer of the Continental army, mounted on the best horse that could be found, started to make the distance of eighty miles between Morristown and Philadelphia in as short a time as possible. He had nothing to fear for some distance, for the region roundabout was patriot ground. Nevertheless he was dressed for the whole journey, or, rather, for his entrance into Philadelphia, and, since the city was the home of the Quakers, had chosen their costume.

He rode all night and breakfasted at Trenton, which place was more than half way to his destination and was as far as his horse could go on a stretch. After resting and feeding the animal he proceeded more leisurely, for he was now on British and Tory territory and had a part to play.

At Trenton young Janeway crossed the Delaware in the flatboat ferry of the period and pursued his way down the right bank of the river through Pennsylvania. Midway between Trenton and Philadelphia, reaching a small village, he stopped for dinner at a tavern.

Being now within ten or fifteen miles of Philadelphia, those he met were citizen patriots and Tories, with here and there a British soldier. A member of General Howe's army scouting in uniform sat opposite him at table.

"Whence come you, neighbor?" he asked of Janeway.

"From the College of New Jersey, where I am studying," replied Janeway.

"And whither go you?"

"Home to my father's plantation in Maryland."

"Princeton is not far from Morristown, where they say is the headquarters of the rebel Washington. Has he many troops with him?"

"I have not been away from college, so I can form no opinion as to that. Thee can find out by going there thyself."

"I am not on that business. My object is to look out for emissaries passing from the rebels to our camp with communications to prominent sympathizers in Philadelphia. To which side do you belong?"

"How can I, who believe that those who use the sword are sinners, belong to either side?"

"Well, I shall return this afternoon and, so far as our paths lie together, would like your company."

Janeway accepted the offer, since he could not well decline without exciting suspicion. On the way the trooper who was garrulous had much to say about the number of communications he had intercepted between the rebels of New York and New Jersey and their fellow rebels in Philadelphia. When they reached the outskirts of Philadelphia Janeway told him at a fork of the road that he must bid him goodby, since the way to his home in Maryland lay to the southwest. The trooper asked why he did not go into Philadelphia, sleep and go on from there in the morning. Janeway replied that he had so many relatives in Philadelphia that if one of them heard he had been there and had not been to see him it would give of-

fense. The trooper urged that, entering in the evening and going out early in the morning, none of them would know of his presence.

Then a bold plan entered Janeway's head. The trooper could gain him an easy access to the city, and, instead of circling round to enter from the south in order to get rid of the man, he decided to go in with him. So he consented with apparent reluctance, saying that he had intended to accept the hospitality for the night of some farmer friend, wherein in the city he must be put to the expense of an inn.

When they reached the British guards they hailed the trooper: "Hello, Connors! Back again?"

"Yes; I've ended a long scout and have learned some things of the rebels. I have a young colleague with me, a fellow traveler."

"He'll have to see the officer of the guard to gain admittance."

"All right. Call him."

The officer was called. Connors took him aside, and after a brief conversation Janeway was suffered to ride in with him.

"But how am I to get out in the morning?" he asked.

"Oh, you'll have to see me about that," replied the scout. "General Howe is mighty particular about persons leaving the city. They're liable to carry information to the rebels."

So Janeway inquired where he could find his friend, not that he desired his assistance, but to keep his confidence. Once having got his dispatch in the city, he had only himself to get out of it.

Bidding his friend good night, telling him that he would need him on the morrow, instead of going to an inn he rode into the stable of the man to whom he bore the message. Then,

having removed the dispatch from its hiding place, going to the front door, he knocked and told the colored servant who admitted him to say to his master that a student of the College of New Jersey wished to see him. When the two men were alone together Janeway produced Washington's appeal for the prominent patriots of Philadelphia to stand fast for independence.

At 3 o'clock in the morning a British picket on the outskirts of the city guarding the road to Trenton, hearing a horse coming toward him from the rear, supposed that an inspecting officer making the rounds was about to visit him. He stood at attention, ready to bring his musket to a position of salute. The horseman rode past him without stopping.

"Halt!"
The sentry had no sooner uttered the word than he brought his piece up to his shoulder and when the stranger changed his horse's gait from a trot to a gallop fired after him. Janeway, who had chosen this means of leaving Philadelphia, was crouched down on his horse's neck, and the bullet cut a slit in the back of his coat. Hearing the shot, the guard sprang to arms, though, being composed of infantry, they were unable to follow the man who had passed out. But cavalry were at hand, and a sergeant, getting together half a dozen mounted men, gave chase.

Janeyew, who knew he would be followed, listened for the clatter of horses' hoofs. He could have dismounted and hid in the wood beside the road, but his horse would have given away his locality. He determined, therefore, to run the race, trusting to the animal's ability to outrun his pursuers. He had at least an hour till dawn before he could be seen and hoped by that time to have outdistanced them. Unfortunately for him, he had strained his mount on his way south and soon discovered that he was unable to do any fleet work. It looked as though he would be captured, and, if so, his identity as a soldier in the Continental army would be established, and, having been in the disguise of a colleague within the enemy's lines, he would be hanged as a spy.

The sounds in rear were drawing nearer, while in the east was a faint streak indicating the coming dawn. Within less than half an hour he would be seen. He was reluctantly coming to the expedient of abandoning his horse and taking to the woods when he saw before him a wooden bridge beyond which the road made a turn behind a thicket. A subterfuge flashed into his brain. Riding over the bridge, his horse's hoofs resounded on the boards. But as soon as he had passed over it he turned the animal's head and rode down under it. There he waited, clutching his horse's nostril so as to prevent a Whitney, and in a few minutes heard the din of hoofs over and within a few feet of his head.

He had now a good chance for his life. His pursuers had undoubtedly heard him crossing the bridge, and the fact of their not hearing footfalls ahead, if not accounted for by the softness of the road, would be by the intervening thicket. However, his pursuers would surely know at dawn that he had eluded them and be most needs "make hay" while it was still dark. He had noticed a diverging road a short distance in his rear, and, riding back, entered it. By sunrise he was hidden in the haymow of a patriot farmer, while his horse was nibbling grain in a manger below. Two days later he rode up to the Morristown headquarters and was introduced into General Washington's office.

"Well?" asked the general quickly. "I delivered your dispatch, general, and received a verbal reply. I was told to say to your excellency that the patriots of Philadelphia would meet the offers of British bribe with the words of General Reed, 'I am not worth purchasing; but, such as I am, the king of Great Britain is not rich enough to buy me.'"

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He was really there as a guard for the horse band, for all that region was full of horse thieves and cutthroats.

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